

Corbin ATC Principal Ronnie Partin Retires With 32 Years Experience in Technical Education

How many people in today's world have made important career moves, but ended up in the same building where they began? Corbin ATC Principal Ronnie Partin, who has served in the capacity of teacher and principal, in the Kentucky Vocational Technical Education system, will retire June 30, 2006 in the same building where he began his teaching career.

Partin grew up as one of fourteen children to Martha and Garrett Partin on a farm in Whitley Co. His early recollections of growing up on the farm include hard work and dedication by "contributing to the family." It was this type of childhood that helped to frame his work ethic and integrity as a man who served his country in the Army Reserves for 31 years and by making a difference in the lives of students in his technical education career.

"The values that I learned on the farm have carried me through a lot over the years," says Partin. "We didn't necessarily realize the value of the skills we learned through necessity; however, that beginning was instrumental in who I am today."





Although Partin grew up modestly, he was taught to appreciate education. When he completed high school, he went to Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) where he received a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education. He graduated from EKU on a Sunday afternoon and joined the Army Reserves the next day.

"I started out in a 2-year drafting program. I did that because I enjoyed drafting in high school. Once I got to EKU, I learned about the

industrial education teaching program and thought that was something I might like to do," says Partin. "So, I changed my major to a 4-year degree. When I graduated, I actually had a job teaching in Clay Co., but ended up turning it down because of my military service obligation."

Partin had been married for less than a year when he joined the military. He went through basic training, infantry advanced individual training (AIT), and then straight to drill sergeant school. When he returned from his initial reserve training, the teaching job was no longer available - so, he went to work in industry at Corbin Brick Co. as a kiln engineer.

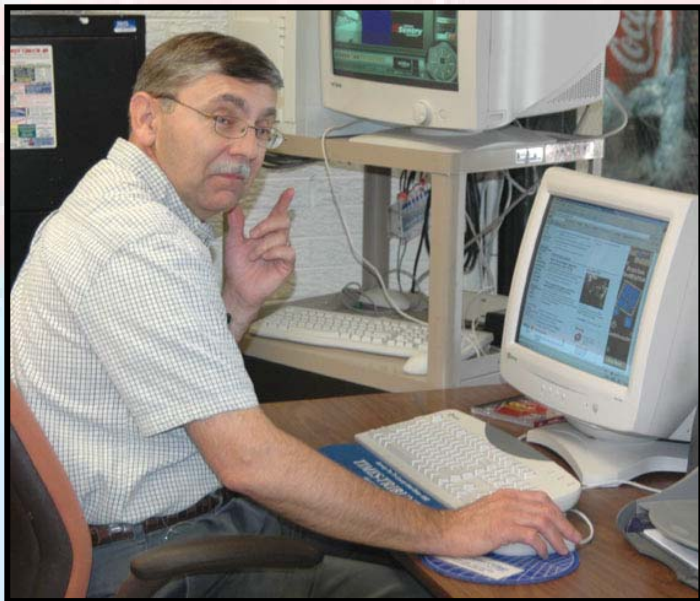
"I was concerned when I went to drill sergeant school because I didn't think I had the temperament, but once I got there, I realized that I could do the job," says Partin. "Many were just back from Viet Nam and not very disciplined. On the other hand, I had just completed college, basic and AIT training, and was very disciplined. So, I was able to complete one of the toughest schools in the Army as an 'honor graduate.' This got my military career off to a good start. Five years later I was

asked to be the company First Sergeant. I stayed in that job pretty much for the remainder of my career. I left for a couple of years to be the Squadron Operations Sergeant, but went back to doing the job I knew best, being the Top Sergeant.”

During his military career Partin earned numerous awards and accolades, including "Outstanding Instructor" award, the Army Achievement Medal (AAM), Army Commendation Medal (ARCOM), and Meritorious Service Medal (MSM). However, there is one award that stands above the rest. He was presented the Legion of Merit (LOM) award when he retired from the military in March 2003. Very few soldiers are awarded the LOM, especially those in the reserves. It is given for exemplary service and Ronnie Partin obviously met his military obligation with integrity and dedication.

Meanwhile, in civilian life, Partin had left the Corbin Brick Co. to accept a drafting position at the Corbin Vocational School (now the ATC) in September 1974. He remained a teacher for 3 years before becoming the principal. The former principal left for a job with the railroad and Partin was offered the job because he was the only teacher in the building with a BS degree at the time.





“My First Sergeant job was much like being a principal,” says Partin. “You basically run the company by making sure your soldiers are trained, paid, fed, promoted on time, and recognized for a job well done. Soldiers call it taking care of ‘Beans and Bullets.’ I think the military training I had over the years helped me to be a better principal. Instead of taking care of soldiers, I have taken care of staff and students. In the military you have to learn to make decisions and work together as a team. It’s the same as a principal and his faculty and staff.”

Partin served as principal of the Corbin ATC from December 1977 through November 1991 and from May 1996 through June 2006. He continued his education and earned a masters degree in vocational administration, from ECU, during his first tenure as principal.

“In the early years, we had two evening postsecondary programs (welding and electricity). We also had adults in every other program in the building, so there were close to 80 students present throughout the year,” says Partin.

At the time, Partin’s attention was mainly focused on adults as this was during the days of “open entry, open exit.” In addition to his job of being principal, he also served as the financial aid officer, guidance counselor and to some extent, the veterans’ representative. (None of these were official titles, just jobs that needed to be addressed by the person in charge).



“I think the programs were successful because of the number of students who graduated and are now leaders within the community,” says Partin. “We had national VICA (now SkillsUSA) winners back in those days who now operate their own businesses. In thinking back, overall, we were successful and helped people to become productive members of society. I’m proud of our efforts.”

In December 1991, he left to become the director of the Laurel State Vocational Technical School (now Laurel Technical College). He stayed until May 1996. It was during this time that he completed his Rank I - Supervisor of Instruction at ECU.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the job because of the opportunities it provided for students, people and industry,” relays Partin. “Moving from a secondary/postsecondary environment of 6 programs to a postsecondary/secondary environment of 15 programs was a bit overwhelming. I had nine employees at Corbin and approximately 50 at Laurel SVTS (including part-time instructors). I had to employ a whole new set of management strategies.”

While at Laurel, the high school restructuring movement was in full swing in Kentucky and Partin believes that the SVTS helped in that overall movement by “partnering with the local high school through Tech Prep and High Schools That Work.” He also believes that another positive initiative that occurred was “industry training and our increased involvement in the training. We had a good relationship with the Chamber of Commerce as well as industry in general. It was a time when partnerships were developed by including all parties. There were some very progressive initiatives that took place in Laurel Co. during that time.”

“My experiences at Laurel were valuable and what I was able to bring back to Corbin has made me a more effective principal. We have earned two Schools of Excellence Awards. We have made good progress toward meeting our Perkins measures and we have contributed to the successes of the local district’s CATS

scores,” says Partin. “I have a very professional and hard working faculty and staff. We don’t always see eye to eye, but we are all concerned about the same thing - and that’s educating the students. I have enjoyed working with each member of my faculty and even had a hand in hiring every teacher in the building except one. They are a good group of people to work with and we have made an impact on the lives of many students. I feel good about what we have all accomplished and that’s a good feeling when one decides to retire.”

Photo at right (l to r): Corbin ATC Welding Instructor Warren Shelton (a 38-year veteran who has worked under 6 principals) and Partin.

“I’ve worked with Ronnie twice. I was here when he was originally hired as a drafting instructor. Then he became principal. He left for Laurel and came back as principal for a second time,” says Shelton. “Ronnie has been great in helping me to equip my program. To me, any principal who works with his or her teachers to make sure that the equipment is up to date has the students best interests at heart, - and that’s one of the more important duties of a principal. Our staff is good to work with and I want to wish Ronnie all the best in his retirement.”





“It has been a joy to work with Ronnie for the short two years I have been here. He went to bat for me before I ever got to this office and has been a person I could look to for advise and confide in ever since. Ronnie is a man of great character, integrity and moral fiber. He is someone who cares a great deal about his staff, the students, and the school as a whole. He will be greatly missed.”

Lisa Miracle, Corbin ATC Teaching Aide

“I started working with Ronnie 18 years ago. He is a very fair person to work for because he is understanding, patient and cares about faculty and students. We have been through a lot of changes together both professionally and personally. We started out as principal and teacher’s aide and ended up as principal and secretary. But most importantly, we will part as friends. He has been a wonderful boss and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with and for him.”

**Dianna Davidson
Corbin ATC Administrative Secretary**



“I have known Ronnie Partin for over 30 years. We first met in 1974 while I was completing my electrical training and he was beginning his career as the new drafting instructor at Corbin ATC. A few years later, I decided to explore the possibility of becoming a teacher and it was Principal Partin who helped me get qualified as a substitute teacher at Corbin ATC. This allowed me to get a first hand look at teaching and to get my foot in the door as a teacher.

It has been a real pleasure to work with Ronnie Partin. I have found him to be a fair and just principal, easy to work with, offering help when needed and staying out of the way when not needed. Most importantly, I have found Ronnie to be a true and helpful friend. I feel the hard work, caring and dedication he has applied to his career over the years will be difficult to replace. I wish him the best of luck in his retirement.”

**Gary Durham,
Corbin ATC Electricity Instructor**

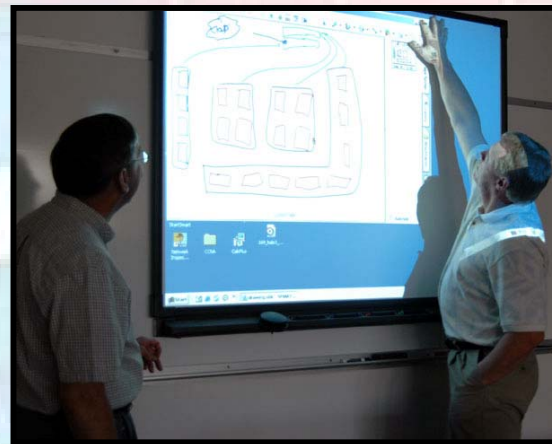


Photo at left: Partin and Information Technology Instructor Jeff Miller.



Gary Durham (l) and Partin



Mark Nantz and Partin

“Mr. Partin has been a good principal and it’s been a privilege to work with him. I’ve been here for over 5-years, but first got acquainted with him through ASE testing. He’s an important person to the local auto industry for many years by giving the ASE certification exams. Mr. Partin has been very helpful to me as a new teacher. I could not have asked for any better of a person to help me make the transition from automotive technician to automotive instructor.”

“I have really enjoyed working with Mr. Partin over these past 2 years and greatly appreciate his help and wisdom in making my first two years of teaching very smooth. I also appreciate his supportive attitude towards all of the staff. He allows us to make decisions and provides input on our programs. He guides the school without dictating the school. To me, this is a mark of leadership. I wish him the best in his retirement and will miss him greatly.”

**Julia Rollins
Corbin ATC Health Sciences Instructor**



“I have know Mr. Partin for many years; however, I have only served as a teacher under his guidance for the past two years. As an individual, he is a man of good moral character and integrity. As a leader, he has allowed me the freedom to be creative and innovative with my program, teaching style, and students – and the interest of the student is always his top priority. I have gained valuable knowledge over the past couple of years from a seasoned veteran of career and technical education who I have grown to trust, admire and respect. We will all miss him as principal of the Corbin ATC.”

**Darrell Horn
Corbin ATC Computer Aided Drafting Instructor**



**Partin (l)
and
Darrell
Horn (r)**

“I must say congratulations and thanks for making my job easier by being such a great principal and true friend. Ronnie Partin is one of the most compassionate individuals I have ever known. As a matter of fact, I consider him to be one of my very best friends and confidant. He is an individual who can tell you about Tech Ed from the old days. However, he never allowed ‘the way we used to do it’ to keep him from moving forward and doing it the new way. No matter how many times that changed, he always managed to keep up with the pace and current trends in Tech Ed. I guess that’s why his school was always progressive. I can say that because he was my principal at Laurel Co. SVTS. When I became principal of Knox Co. ATC, he became my mentor and confidant. Now, I’m his area supervisor. As a matter of fact, even after he told me he was considering retirement, he continued to lead his school and work diligently without losing inspiration. He never appeared to slow down and be on the downslide toward retirement. That’s the kind of principal he has always been. He put the needs of his students before himself. Over the years, he has consistently helped move our system forward with his integrity, positive attitude, and leadership.”

**Linda Floyd
KY Tech Area Supervisor**



**Ronnie Partin and Linda Floyd
take a few moments to
reminisce.**

Question and Answer Session

Q: What do you consider to be the most important contribution during your tenure?

A: The most important contribution is our role in helping all of the students who have come through this school to become productive members of this society. Just about everywhere I go throughout the county, I meet someone who has gone to our school. We had a parent walk in a couple of weeks ago and say to me, 'Are you still here?' His daughter is in health sciences and he remembers that the welding training he received at our school was instrumental in his getting a job at the railroad. It's this type of feedback that reminds us about how much of an impact we have had on the lives of students. That's the most important contribution.

Q: Over the course of years, what do you see as major changes in Vocational Technical Education?

Improved KY Tech Curriculum

The curriculum has been tremendously improved. When I began my teaching career in drafting, there was no curriculum. I created the curriculum and I taught pretty much what I knew best. That was not uncommon in those days.

Advancement in Technology

I can remember when we would get a tasking from Frankfort sent by mail and we would have two weeks to get it back. Now, we get it by e-mail and we can send it back the same day.

Instructional Technology.

I remember the first CAD system we bought was an Apple IIE. I learned that a computer is a whole lot like a mule. Without the proper accessories, it's not worth much. Today, we have state of the art equipment that runs the latest software.

I can also remember when we bought our first calculator in the drafting lab. It cost \$350.00. It was basic and you could probably buy it now for \$1.99. So, we have come a long way.

Marketing

We have done a lot to improve how we market ourselves internally and externally from a grass roots perspective. We now have program brochures that were developed for us to print off and use when needed. We can even make the necessary changes because the files have been created using a Word document, instead of having something printed up and out of date before we use them up. We have the web site where we can promote teachers, programs and students, and we can download information. We have certificates that can be awarded to students for reaching specific standards. It has made our job at the local level easier.

Q: Is there anything you would have done differently during your tenure as principal?

A: I think I would try to get to know the students better because typically a principal gets to know the best students because of awards and recognition, and the poor students because of disciplinary measures. Sometimes you don't get to know the students who fall between those two measures. I probably would have gotten more involved with the high schools, like Donna Hopkins did. I would try to link more with the high school.

Q: What guidance or advice you would provide to new principals?

A: I had a regional director who once told me, 'If the decisions I made were in the best interests of the students, I could not be faulted.' That's what I would pass on to new principals coming into the system.

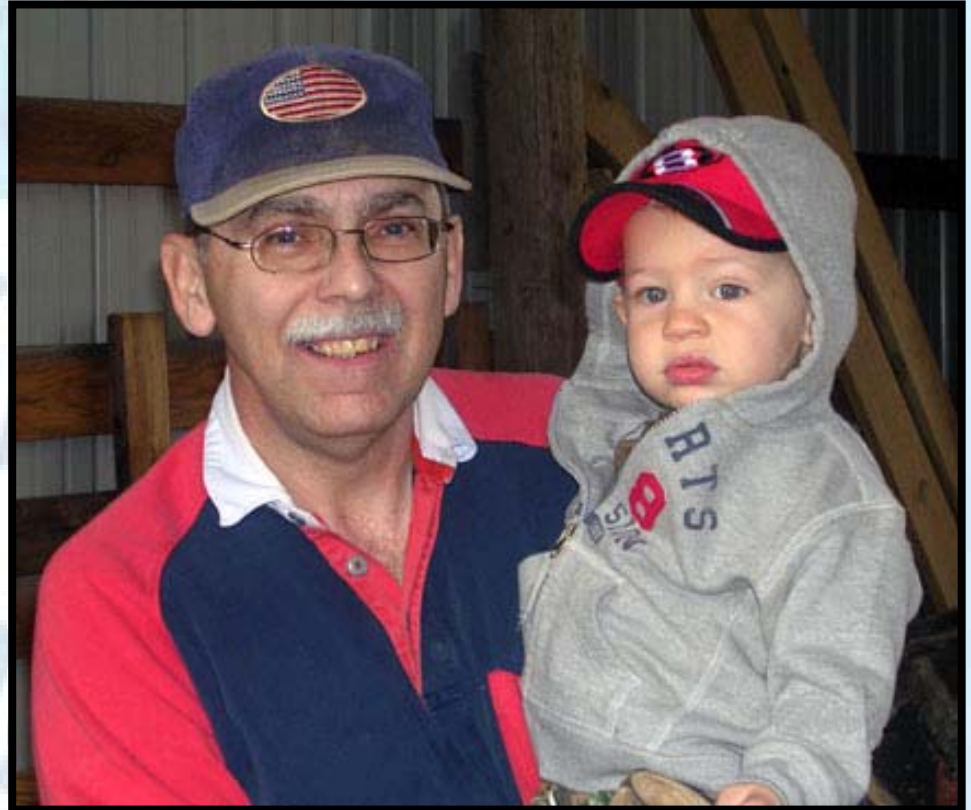
Q: What do you want to be remembered by?

A: Integrity. I've tried to be a positive role model for students and staff. I tried to not do anything to discredit the school or system.

Photo: Partin and 22-month old grandson, Connor.

Retirement plans include enjoying his 150 acre farm and taking care of Connor.

"I guess one of the most rewarding things is to put-put across the farm with Connor on the 4 wheeler. He'll come to the house and say 'key, key.' Then, he goes to get the key and takes it right to the garage door. He goes in the door and puts the key in the 4-wheeler. We love driving around the farm."



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